

Festival of Lights

Continued from page 1

“It can be challenging,” said Chaplain (Lt. Col.) Jeremy Steinberg, a Reserve Soldier on duty with the 221st BSB Chaplains Office since July. “What’s fulfilling for me at least in this job, specifically because of the isolation, people can feel drawn together.”

Steinberg, whose latest call to active duty is about to end, recalled the satisfaction of being able to provide religious authority for Jewish Soldiers deployed to Kosovo or Bosnia during every Rosh Hashana [Jewish New Year] and Passover [the annual springtime commemoration of the exodus from Egypt] celebration during the past two years.

Being alone during major holidays that are often not even visible to their fellow Soldiers can have a particularly poignant quality for Jews in the military.

“They’re just a little stuck,” said Schwab. “I was in Kuwait for Passover and I met a Jewish Soldier who was just about to be sent back to Iraq, and he was just so glad to see me.”

Does encountering a Jewish chaplain, on the other hand, raise difficulties for the majority of gentile Soldiers?

“There are two different things,” said Schwab. “If a Soldier’s having a personal problem it doesn’t always mean it’s a religious problem. If someone is having a crisis of faith, I’d tell him I’m Jewish and try to refer him to a chaplain of his faith.”

Jewish chaplains have to just put their identity and faith on the line and carry on with their duty, whatever reaction they elicit. “That is the chaplain’s responsibility, first and foremost,” said Steinberg. “There are not enough of us and we’re probably not doing enough.”

“In the military the reaction to Jews is pretty much like it is in America in general,” said Schwab.

If that’s the case, do Soldiers run into the anti-Semitic attitudes and behaviors that still crop up from time to time in American society?

“It’s a tide that ebbs and flows,” said Steinberg. “Especially with that movie that came out in the spring [Mel Gibson’s “The Passion of the Christ”] — that didn’t help. I felt the backlash more than I ever have in my life.”

“As a sailor I did a little bit, though not so much,” said Schwab. “In my unit there was another Jewish sailor, and on his locker someone drew a swastika. They found out who it was. It was just ignorance essentially.”

“There was some joking around, but never anything I would call anti-Semitic,” said Knaus. “I had

some odd experiences when I first came into basic training. There were some young Soldiers who had a kind of ignorance, who didn’t know what the religion is about.”

The occasional unpleasantness is more than made up for by the general atmosphere of acceptance and support, said Steinberg. “The big positive is that I’ve been very satisfied in my career. There are lots of good, sensitive people who want to support equality and diversity. Still there’s that small minority. It comes from ignorance more than anything else. It tends to come out when there are issues about kosher food or the Jewish holidays.”

Do Jewish Soldiers still encounter barriers to being able to take off for major holidays?

“I guess it happens,” said Schwab. “I heard the story when I was in the Navy of a Soldier who wanted to take off for Yom Kippur [the Day of Atonement, the holiest day of the year for Jews] and he kept getting turned down by his officers. So he just kept going up the chain of command till he hit a one-star general who said, ‘I hope you’re taking the day off because I know I am.’”

“It happens, but again, if Jewish people are true to their faith and not just using it to get an extra day off, it’s respected more and more apt to be given consideration,” he said.

For her part, Knaus never experienced problems with the issue.

“No, I didn’t. Generally speaking, a policy letter goes out through the senior chain of command, and that helps get the word out. I guess I was lucky. My commanders were pretty aware. My commanders took the opportunity to give me the time. I never had any problem with that.”

“It’s true, I’m from Connecticut, and compared to the rest of the country, in New York, New Jersey and Connecticut it’s not unusual going to high school to have people take off for the holidays. It was a bit of a culture shock for me. It wasn’t necessarily a negative attitude. It was more like people not knowing,” she said.

The occasional disregard for Jewish sensitivities or perspectives can also manifest itself in behavior



that, while not overtly hostile, is rather more dismissive because it is uninformed, said Schwab.

“Even other chaplains, for instance when they close a prayer with ‘In Jesus’ name . . .’ — there’s got to be another way. We’ve even raised the issue with the chief of chaplains. There’s a way we can all pray and be associated.”

The flip side of ignorance is being somewhat exotic. For many young Soldiers, meeting a Jewish comrade may be their first encounter ever with a Jew, an encounter with a real flesh-and-blood human being rather than a mythological concept.

“I found that most Soldiers were interested,” said Knaus. “When I was in Korea and we would go on retreats, I would take my non-Jewish friends along. I’ve had a mostly positive experience. Soldiers more than most, because there is such a mix of backgrounds, tend to be more open to learning what their neighbors are about.”

Friday services

With both Steinberg and Schwab assigned to Wiesbaden for the past several months, the community’s Jewish members have had an opportunity that is somewhat unusual for Soldiers overseas — regular access to a Friday night worship service to welcome the Sabbath.

“It’s unusual to have two Jewish chaplains in the community,” said Knaus. “This is the first time I’ve been anywhere where there’s a rabbi.” Previous assignments in Korea meant no local off-post Jewish community and one Jewish chaplain dedicated to the peninsula.

“This congregation is pretty much brand new — there was nothing here before,” said Steinberg. “There’s been a pretty good response once you advertise it. It’s been going up steadily. We’re pretty close to a minyan [the quorum of 10 adults necessary for communal prayer]. It’s from a traditional prayer book. We do as much in English as necessary.”

The group meets in a former storage room in the Wiesbaden Army Airfield Chapel Annex.

A Hanukkah party will take place there Dec. 14 at 7 p.m. All are welcome.

With Steinberg about to depart, Schwab will continue to lead the congregation as long as he remains in Wiesbaden and said he hoped it would continue when he moves on.

“I would hope so. We have a Jewish lay leader here too, so if I deploy they should be able to keep it going,” he said.

The Temple Mount through history

Site of original Hanukkah remains holy to people of three religious faiths

By David Ruderman
104th Area Support Group Public Affairs Office

The Temple Mount in Jerusalem, the site of the original Hanukkah, has been at the center of Jewish history for over 3,000 years. According to the Bible, Abraham traveled there from Beersheba to sacrifice his son Isaac on the height called Mount Moriah. In the biblical narrative, God intervenes in the form of a messenger who commands him to sacrifice a ram instead.

The Jebusite city of Jerusalem was conquered by King David in 1,000 B.C.E., and he established his city just to the south of the Temple Mount. His son Solomon built the first Temple, which was destroyed in 586 B.C.E. by the Babylonian ruler Nebuchadnezzar, who took the social elite into bondage. The conquest shortly thereafter of much of Mesopotamia by the Persians led to the return of the Babylonian exiles under the rule of Cyrus the Great and the restoration of the Temple under the leadership of Nehemiah and Ezra at the end of the sixth century B.C.E.

The Temple continued as the center of Jewish ritual life through the following centuries. Alexander the Great was persuaded to spare the city in 332 B.C.E. on his way to conquering the Persian Empire. After his death his empire was divided among his generals, and the Seleucid dynasty based in Damascus competed with the Ptolemaic rulers based in Egypt for control of the Land of Israel and Jerusalem among other territories.

The ascension to that throne of Antiochus IV Epiphanes in 175 B.C.E. ushered in a time of intense persecution of the Israelites. Traditional practices were banned and the Temple desecrated, being turned into a shrine to the king. The oppression led to a revolt under the leadership of a priestly family known as the Maccabees that began in 168 B.C.E.

Using guerilla tactics, the Maccabees defeated the far superior Seleucid forces in a series of battles and retook control of Jerusalem in 165 B.C.E. Hanukkah commemorates the rededication of the Temple at that time. The geopolitical gyrations of the next 20 years involving the Seleucids, the



Photo by Karen Edge
Miriam and Zev Schwab watch as Chaplain (Capt.) Mordechai Schwab lights a Hanukkah menorah at the Wiesbaden Army Airfield Chapel Annex.

Ptolemies and the distant but increasingly powerful Romans resulted in the establishment of a free Jewish monarchy that ruled from 142-63 B.C.E.

The Hasmonaean Dynasty ended with the Roman conquest and assumption of political control. Under Roman tutelage Herod ascended to power in 40 B.C.E. and greatly expanded the Temple Mount, erecting the enormous retaining walls that stand till this day.

It was the site of the most significant events in the life of Jesus, who was crucified in Jerusalem by the Romans in 33 C.E. His original circle of Jewish followers resided there until they were expelled in 62. Jesus’ brother James, the head of the church in Jerusalem, is reported to have been martyred by being thrown from the Temple Mount heights.

Eight years later the Temple was destroyed and the inhabitants of the city slaughtered by the Roman general Titus. The rebuilding of the city as Aelia Capitolina at the instigation of Emperor Hadrian and the erection of a temple to Jupiter on the site in 132 sparked the Bar Kochba Revolt, another attempt to re-establish Jewish sovereignty that ended in failure in 135. Jewish independence in Jerusalem would be re-established only in 1948.

In the intervening centuries Jerusalem remained the center of Jewish spiritual life and aspirations. Though Jewish communities, buffeted by the geopolitical forces of the centuries, continued to inhabit the city with occasional interludes of persecution and banishment, the Temple was never rebuilt.

The city is holy as well to Christians and Muslims.

The Church of the Holy Sepulcher was originally erected in 335 and has been reconstructed over the centuries. The Muslims conquered Jerusalem in 638, erecting the Dome of the Rock and the Al-Aksa Mosque on the Temple Mount by the end of the seventh century to mark the site where the Quran says the Prophet Mohammed ascended to heaven during his Night Journey.

Today the site and the city of which it is the center remain holy to the three monotheistic religions of the West, and there is little doubt that its status will remain significant in the future.

Frankfurt’s Explora Museum

Puzzle solvers of all ages invited to one-of-a kind exhibition

Story and photos by Karl Weisel
104th Area Support Group Public Affairs Office

Optical challenges, hands-on puzzles and an invitation to look at the world through three-dimensional glasses are among the highlights of a visit to Frankfurt’s Explora Museum.

Located in a former several-story-high World War II bunker in a quiet residential neighborhood, the museum is a showcase of optical illusions, holograms and exhibits aimed at awakening an interest in more than one level of the viewing experience. Upon entry visitors are provided with their very own pair of green-and-red tinted glasses through which they are invited to peruse the many images which have been created to portray more than a simple two-dimensional universe.

Drawings of artist Christo Javacheff’s “wrapped Berlin Reichstag” take on depth as one dons the glasses and moves around the flat surface. It’s as if one could reach into the artist’s work and rearrange the objects and people within. One experiences the same sensation in a poster for the film “Tomb Raider” which is displayed next to a print of Leonardo da Vinci’s “Vitruvian Man” that obviously served as its inspiration.

Many of the images are familiar — M.C. Escher drawings, Dali and Picasso paintings — but it is a treat to become reacquainted with them among the many eye-opening optical puzzlers.

The museum building, which once served as protection for Frankfurters in the neighborhood from Allied bombs, was built in 1938 and features two-meter-thick outside walls.

Even before entering the exhibition, one is provided with an obvious clue that humor plays a hefty role in the exhibition. A giant bust of Vladimir Ilyich Ulyanov Lenin adorned in a hefty pair of three-D goggles welcomes newcomers to

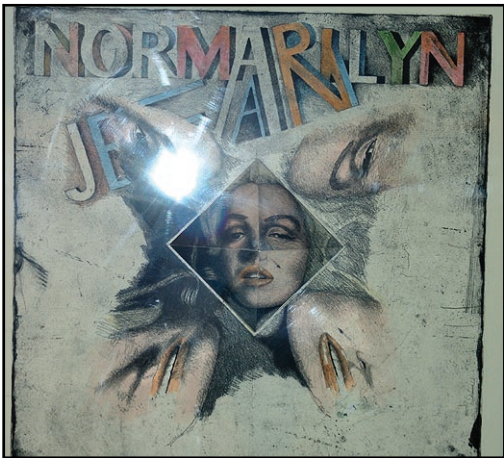


An Explora Museum visitor examines a poster using three-dimensional glasses to reveal a multifaceted image. Various optical challenges are presented in the Frankfurt exhibition hall. Photo below: four pieces of Marilyn Monroe are joined together in a pyramid mirror in the center of one image.

the facility. Once inside visitors are directed up the stairs to wander through the gallery. Because of the dense outer walls and dimly lit interior in some rooms, one has the impression that empty frames await viewing in some rooms. But closer inspection reveals a world populated by the holographic likes of a very real-looking, three-dimensional Dracula, baskets of eggs, cubes and other animate and inanimate objects.

Besides the many puzzlers — drawings which reveal an entirely different image when viewed from a different angle or perspective — are stereoscopic pictures and Single Image Random Dot Stereograms. While most of the optical teasers reveal a second level fairly quickly, the SIRDs take a serious dose of patience.

Young people may enjoy the hands-on puzzles as much as the visuals. Besides solving T-form and tower puzzles, younger visitors are welcome to make music with cowbells, a steel drum, piano and other instruments.



Museum curator Gerhard Stief first began displaying his collection in the town of Dinkelsbühl at a sister museum. In 1994 he opened in Frankfurt-Rödelheim, before acquiring the former bunker and opening at the present site a year later.

One of the most intriguing holograms titled “Shower Lady” features an almost cinematic quality viewing experience. As one moves from left to right the three-dimensional woman depicted in the shower seems to become aware of the viewer and takes steps to protect herself from prying eyes. One is rewarded with a wink from the modest maiden as one reaches the far right side of the image.

The Explora is not the largest museum in the world, but because many of the displays require patient viewing, one finds the time passing quickly. A cafe in the museum features refreshments for those needing a break.

The Explora Museum is located at Glauburg Platz in the Nordend section of Frankfurt. To get there by public transportation take the U-5 tram to Glauburgstrasse and walk about 300 meters on that street before turning left onto Lortzingstrasse.

The Explora is open Tuesday through Sunday from 11 a.m. to 6 p.m. Admission is €8 for adults and €5 for children. For more information visit the www.exploramuseum.de website or call civ (069) 788 888.



A youngster assembles puzzle pieces in the Explora Museum.